



Klamath Network Featured Creature

April 2010

California Poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*)

FIELD NOTES:

General Description:

The California poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*) can grow to be 1-2 feet tall. The finely feathered leaves (like a fern's) on the stem are a bluish-green and lobed. This flower's fruit is a small slender capsule that breaks in two to release black seeds. The striking flower can be yellow to orange and is composed of four silky petals surrounding many stamens and two fused carpels. A solitary flower will bloom at the end of a slender stalk. Flowers appear from February to September. The petals close at night and in foul weather, reopening again in the morning or after the wind, rain, or cold has passed. Sometimes, the flowers will stay closed under cloudy skies.

Habitat and Distribution:

The California poppy is native to California and western North America, from Baja Mexico to southwestern Washington. It lives in grassy open areas, especially hillsides, from sea level to 6,500 feet. This poppy thrives in full sun and sandy, well drained, poor soil. Not surprisingly, it grows well in disturbed areas, such as along roadsides. Due to its beauty and simple growing needs, the California poppy has spread widely in other areas (such as Chile and Australia), especially in disturbed environments. In the US, it is recognized as a potentially invasive species. However, the flower itself has been displaced in large areas of its original range by more invasive exotic plants like mustard and annual grasses. It is drought tolerant and said to be a "drought escaper," since it may lay dormant as seed for a long time and then burst onto the landscape in golden abundance once a good rain comes.

Ethnobotany:

Native Americans had many uses for the California poppy, including: using the oil from the poppy's seeds mixed with bear fat as a hair dressing, boiling the greens to be eaten as a vegetable, applying the pollen as a cosmetic, using a decoction to kill lice, and using it medicinally as a mild pain killer for toothaches and insomnia.



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:California_poppy_1.jpg



<http://conservationtutorials.org/wp-content/uploads/california-poppy.jpg>



http://plants.usda.gov/gallery/pubs/esca2_001_php.jpg



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:California_Poppy_1.jpg

Reproduction:

The poppy's seeds germinate after the first fall rains or after the soil warms in the spring. Blooms occur in spring and early summer in hotter climates and most of the summer in cooler coastal climates. After blooming, the tops die back and the plants become dormant during the summer heat. The plant survives in the form of a fleshy taproot. Depending on the climate, it is either an annual (colder climates) or perennial (milder climates) through its range. In colder climate areas, the poppies will renew themselves from seed each year; in milder climates, they may survive several years, resprouting each fall and reseeding.

And the Winner is...

The California poppy is the state flower of...California! In 1890, California held a vote as to which flower should represent the Golden State. The California poppy, the Mariposa lily, and the Matilija (giant) poppy were the contestants. The Mariposa lily received three votes, the Matilija poppy none, and the California poppy won by a landslide victory. After a long delay, it was officially named the state's flower in 1903. April 6th is California Poppy Day.

Where to see in the Network:

The California poppy can be found in Redwood National and State Parks, Oregon Caves National Monument, Lava Beds National Monument, and Whiskeytown National Recreation Area and along many of the routes that will take you to all the Klamath Network parks!

More Information:

Storer, T. I., and R. L. Usinger. Sierra Nevada natural history. 1963. University of California Press, Berkeley, CA.

Schoenherr, A. A. 1992. A Natural history of California. University of California Press, Berkeley, CA.